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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Human rights questions

Letter dated 24 July 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly*

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you a statement issued today, 24 July 1998, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea concerning Ethiopia's gross violations of the human rights of Eritrean civilians living in that country.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly under agenda items 20, 107 and 112.

(*Signed*) Haile **Menkerios**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* Previously issued under the symbol S/1998/690.

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Annex

Statement on Ethiopia's gross violation of basic human rights

In an affront to the international community, which has been interceding with the Ethiopian Government to stop the massive and illegal arrest of Eritreans residing in Ethiopia, the Addis Ababa authorities have started a third wave of arrests in preparation for more deportations. There are ominous reports of fresh and widespread arrests, especially in Addis Ababa in the past three days.

More than 11,000 Eritreans were rounded up and deported in the most inhumane way in two previous rounds from major centres in the country and villages in the border areas. People were dragged from their homes in the middle of the night, families cruelly separated from their underage children, and even suckling babies left behind. Property was looted after the families were deported and dispersed.

The Ethiopian authorities have also arrested thousands of young Eritreans under the ridiculous claim that their enrolment in the national service, the summer school campaign or previous role in the liberation war renders them "a potential threat to the security of Ethiopia". More than 1,000 Eritrean youth thus remain "prisoners of war" in a detention camp at Fitche. Eighty university students are included among these hostages. Many innocent Eritreans are also being held in prisons in other parts of the country, particularly in Makelle and Adi Grat. Two Eritrean Catholic nuns were recently arrested in Adi Grat, while five other priests who were running schools in south-eastern Ethiopia were deported.

Eritreans who hold the nationality of other countries are similarly being arrested and deported, although some have been rescued owing to the protests of their respective embassies.

Many Governments, international agencies and human rights groups have been interceding with the Ethiopian authorities to stop this gross violation of human rights, but "quiet diplomacy" has not delivered tangible results. The authorities in Addis Ababa continue to trample on basic human rights and pursue with impunity the arbitrary arrest and mass deportation of Eritreans in total contempt of the concerns of the international community. The Ethiopian Prime Minister even had the temerity to publicly state that "Ethiopia has an unlimited right to expel any foreigner if it did not like the colour of his/her eyes".

Addis Ababa is moreover resorting to the most base practice of fabricating lies to accuse the Eritrean Government of similar violation of human rights. To this end, it has revived the "Moral Boosting Department" which the Mengistu regime had established with the help of the former German Democratic Republic to concoct and spread lies to disinform the domestic and international communities. Among the outrageous lies that this Department has fabricated this week are wild allegations of "group rapes by Eritrean fighters"; "burning of seven Ethiopians in Alla", "the wanton shooting of Ethiopians who wanted to return to their country in Adi Quala", "the public beating of Ethiopian civilians in Asmara and the parading of prisoners of war". The banality of these allegations has been verified by a British Broadcasting Corporation correspondent in Eritrea, the International Committee of the Red Cross and members of the diplomatic community in Asmara, but the international press continues to pick up these allegations at face value without the necessary verification.

The Government of Eritrea finds the silence in the face of Ethiopia's gross violation of human rights and the inflammatory campaign of disinformation shocking and

unacceptable. The international community should no longer confine its reactions to mute diplomatic protests. These excesses must be condemned publicly and unequivocally.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asmara
24 July 1998